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Carrey: He tries to do most of his own stunts

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Walt Disney is to Charles Addams. Or what Marc Chagall is to Salvador Dali.

Dark side, indeed.

"My, Myself and Irene" is a roughhouse, raunch-out comedy about mental instability starring an actor who seems not entirely unacquainted with the subject. In the film, he plays a split personality — good, totally repressed Charlie and his nasty, hilarious unbridled alter-ego Hank. If he could have an additional personality, says Carrey, it would be "Just this side of Jesus. Sounds like a play, doesn't it? Off-Broadway — 'Just This Side of Jesus!'"

Why, he's asked, are so many Canadians so funny (most of the "Saturday Night Live" bunch, for instance)?

His answer is instant: "Repression. We're highly English in our influence. That's where Monty Python came from — 'don't embarrass us.' There's a little bit of that going on. So when people go out, they go out for. And it's a wonderful thing to watch.

"Comedy, to a certain extent, is done by shy people. Basically they don't want to reveal their feelings so they intellectualize things. That's kind of where it comes from. That angst thing — maybe repression makes you angry. So that's all part of it. Now that we've broken it down and made it boring."

Love is in the air

At the moment, Carrey is being publicly forced to reveal his feelings. The man we're watching in the news conference is Jim Carrey in Love, Earlier in the day, his *namesake* Zellweger — a woman sweet, almost naive, and radiating genuine lovability rather than a theatrical impression of it — talked about Carrey in terms clearly love-struck.

One of the Farrellys who made "Irene" — Peter — said that even though they're telling the world their romance didn't officially begin until after the film, Carrey kept telling him during the shooting how enthralled he was with Zellweger. You can, in the film's final gag, actually see it. Whatever was or wasn't going on, you're watching two people whose romantic chemistry couldn't possibly be more obvious.

Told later about Farrelly's publicity indiscretion, Carrey says: "God, he is the worst friend in the world. I love him but he is like the mouth of the century. I mean, shut up man! Shut up!"

On Zellweger — the second co-star to be romantically linked with Carrey (the first was Lauren Holly of the Farrellys' "Dumb and Dumber" from whom he divorced) — he says "what we are is too special to share with strangers in the world. I will say that we had the most wonderful, old-fashioned, tremendously freezing, Something You Dream About Happening Which Never Happens Anymore type of courtship. We're having a great time. She's absolutely a gem of a human being — one of the best actresses I've ever seen in my life.

"That's why I wanted her on the movie in the first place. It was not to go after her. But to at least be supported by somebody I could learn something from . . . She's a great person. She is what she seems to be. She's hilarious (too). She gets shy in these situations but she's very funny."

Better luck next time

Earlier, the comic maniac was asked why he thought he was so conspicuously bypassed by the Motion Picture Academy for his performances in "Man on the Moon" and "The Truman Show."

"They're basically, that's why. But you know I've really got to be careful about what I say ... Please say I was being facetious. Sometimes these jokes don't translate. I honestly feel that I am so gifted in my life that I don't sweat those things. I think it would be ungrateful. I have a great life. I have great people in my life. I have money. For a person who made his career talking through his butt, I'm able to work with Peter Weir and Milos Forman in serious properties. Somehow the public has allowed me to do that.

"I'm really lucky and I know that. I also understand the academy. Their experience of me over five or six movies was a very crazy comedic persona. In two dramatic films, they're just not going to bend that far. It's going to take a while.

Fire Marshall Bill was one of Jim Carrey's hideous characters from his early days on TV's "In Living Color."

I'll probably have to accept it from my seat by the time I get it. I'll be like Stephen Hawking or something. I'll have to have somebody go up there (and get the Oscar) while I stay there and slobber on myself.

"I think I'm getting better as I go along. It's just like my life. Like my schooling. I left school in the 10th grade. But I read. And schooled myself. Plus I dealt with drunks for 15 years in the comedy clubs and that's a Ph.D. of some kind. It's just growing — getting deeper and more involved psychologically. The drama is rubbing off on the comedy, the comedy is rubbing off on the drama.

"Honestly, I've got to say, I've got the best job. I'm fascinated with human behavior. It's like being a psychiatrist or some kind of scientist. You have to break a character down to some place where you can sympathize with it."

Still, Carrey is a wild and tremendous comic actor and he knows it. Though he makes light of it, he's also a student of comedy, past and present.

A hang-up job

Even though he got hurt on "My, Myself and Irene," he tries to do his own stunts, he says, because, "I don't like the stunt man to do it unless it's life threatening in some way. If it means a bruise or a bang or possibly a sprained ankle if you do it, I'd rather do it myself. It's like the Buster Keaton comedy tradition. The audience wants to know that it's you doing the bit. A lot of these things are physical bits that won't look the same with someone else's physicality, especially someone who's trained to tuck and fold and do all the safe stuff . . . I was hurting myself every day (on this film). I would go home and say 'mmmmm, my jugular's open. Oh, goo.'

Asked about the future of film comedy, he says: "I think it's going to be more and more brutal — for a little while anyway. It always reflects what's going on in society, what we have to deal with. People talk about movies desensitizing people. I think society desensitized movies.

"I like all the new guys. Tom Green. I think, is funny in a wild, Andy Kaufmanish kind of way. Some of it is like, 'yeah, whatever.' But the other half is, 'wow, that was incredible.' I think Adam Sandler is great. I think he gets criticized a lot for being stupid or whatever. That is what I used to get all the time. I think there's something in him that's innately attractive to people. So he's more than a comedian, I think."

Carrey was free enough with the press last week in New York to make life a tiny bit uncomfortable for a New York Post reporter trying gamely to ask him a question. Kidding on the square, he asked her "what is your newspaper? Is it a tabloid or is it a newspaper? . . . I think there are real stories in it but sometimes it's just totally imagined crap."

He took exception to an item recently in Liz Smith's column, he said, and discovered it wasn't even written by Smith but by a fellow named "Dennis."

"I'm just trying to be honest with you." Is it an odd thing for that to happen? . . . " he said to her. "There's meanness and there's humor, too, and I guess it's hard for you, too, to see the line sometimes."

He admitted being stung frequently by what he reads about himself in the press but generally feels in "the whole fame thing . . . I have a wonderful place in it. A careful of people will drive by and yell, 'hey, man.' I see people walk up to me with grins on their faces. It's a great feeling . . . I like people and I don't want them to be uncomfortable."

And, for the second that he says it, he no doubt doesn't.

And yet he can't help it. His new movie has already received some criticism from the mental health community for its portrayal of mental illness.

His own demons are sometimes so close to the surface that we laugh precisely because we're uncomfortable — and are somehow buoyed by our suspicion that he's usually uncomfortable, too.

Despite all the love-struck happiness, equanimity and professionally funny panache of his news conference, the giftedly ultra-strange come who once gave us Fire Marshall Bill is obviously still very much alive and well inside Jim Carrey, Comedy Superstar.

It is precisely what makes him so good as he is.

He may try desperately to sound like a man who has it altogether.

That he clearly doesn't is probably why audiences love him and will continue to for the immediate future.

Earl's: Raney, Glosson are his favorites

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selection of big pies, and patrons really do drink their cold beverages from fruit jars, but the heart of the place is found on the periphery of the big L-shaped room. Just inside the door is a small radio studio where Northrup conducts a remote broadcast every Friday night on WXRL-AM, including a segment he calls "Country Closet Classic Time," where you have your records all stacked up in the closet, you know (laugh), you open the door, and they all fall out."

Off in the corner of the restaurant are cabinets loaded with autographed hats and pictures, old 78 rpm records, and posters pitching concerts by a host of country music stars (Jimmy Rogers, the Singing Brakeman, has a special place of honor). Nearby stands a jukebox loaded with tunes by hall-of-fame artists such as Ernest Tubb and Roy Acuff alongside records by important but lesser known performers like Deacon Brumfield and Lee Moore.

Northrup, a forthright man with a gentle but firm opinion and huge white mutton-chop sideburns reminiscent of the pair Bill Monroe once sported, believes that what often passes for country music these days lacks originality.

"There's no individualism anymore in a recording," he says. "Years ago, when you heard Ernest Tubb, you only had to hear two licks and you knew it was Ernest Tubb's troubadours. Today, its almost like automobiles, you can't tell a Ford from a Chevy, and a Chevy from a Buick, and a Buick from a . . . you follow what I mean?"

He began listening to country music at an early age and Northrup's love of the art has remained true to his past. The way he tells it, you can almost see the young farm boy hanging around the family Zenith.

"I always lived on a farm," he said, "and . . . in the wintertime when the snow was deep, you would get your work done out in the barn and then come in, eat popcorn and scratch the radio dial for good old music."

He was especially fond of Wayne Raney and Lonnie Glosson, a harmonica duo with a popular, nationally syndicated radio program broadcasting from WCKY in Cincinnati.

This is the kind of acoustic driven music that Northrup treats as his passion, numbering Roy Acuff, Merle Travis and Jimmy Rogers among his heroes while leaving out the many in the current crop of hat-rock cowboys. It is also the kind of music that Northrup speaks of when he maintains that "good old traditional bluegrass is the closest today to what we enjoyed (in) country music back in the 1940s and 1950s."

The restaurant was started back in 1957 as a summer season income opportunity, and until the enterprise was able to stand on its own, Northrup worked odd jobs.

By 1967, he took a big step in support of the music he loved and sponsored his first concert, bringing performers to a stage he had set up near the restaurant parking lot. According to Jim McReynolds — the high, lonesome voice of bluegrass legends Jim and Jesse — "When he (Earl) started (putting on concerts) he was just booking the real, strictly traditional country groups in there and then he got into bringing some of the bluegrass people in."

Forty-three years later finds a show with its own dedicated setting: A large field behind the restaurant called Earl's Sunshine Music Park, complete with a roofed stage and a covered structure where patrons can put their lawn chairs.

The music heard at the Sunshine Music Park hasn't really changed that much over the years because Northrup doesn't want it to.

"I feel its my duty to help preserve some of it," he says. Because "these people (the musicians) have got to have a place to go play and express their talents. If we don't have this, it's going to, in time, wash out and disappear."

He books all the performers ("I'm always researching, always looking for the unusual act"), takes care of the advertising, and hovers over the whole process with the certitude of a benevolent mastmanager ("I'm the only one who knows how it should be done").

Northrup's concerts have developed quite a following among people who feel the same way he does about bluegrass and old-time country music.

"They're so hungry for (the) first show to start," says Northrup. "Remember, it's been a long winter, they've listened to their CDs and tapes and that, and they are so hungry when it comes to the first show to get back into the groove."

By the same token, he feels that if he "had 10 people here, I would still feel that I was richly rewarded because I love the music so well."

It's easy to get a sense of what he means when you listen to conversations Northrup has with longtime patrons of his restaurant about some of the older, more established performers that have appeared at the park (like Jim and Jesse, Doyle Lawson or the Lewis Family) or a new talent on the traditional music scene like the Freight Hoppers from last year's series or Valerie Smith on this year's program.

Old or new, "it's amazing to me when certain (performers) have this skill to bring the gut feeling out through the fingertips, and everything is played by gut feeling," Northrup says.

Schedule: A gospel finale

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for Dale Ann Bradley. Bob Paisley's Southern Grass rounds out a bit of stellar programming on Northrup's part.

♦ Aug. 25 — "I always end my season with a gospel show. Always have, always will," says Northrup. The acts on the final program are the Dixie Melody Boys, the Isaacs Family and the Sullivan Family.

Earl's Sunshine Music Park is located behind Earl's Drive-In near the corner of Routes 16 and 39, on Buffalo-Olean Road, just south of Chaffee. There are 10 acres of lighted parking (including space for motor homes). With the exception of the June 23 show, which is priced at $17 per ticket, tickets are $12.

— Garrard MacTaggart

Critics: Parties in the dormitories

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versity at Buffalo a few months before, having been music editor of Ellion, the school's student magazine. But I was still plugged into the town's critical community, despite having gone over to the other side.

At UB, I'd taken a course offered by the school's American Studies Department, with several other rock 'n' roll literati, including Spectrum reviewers, Billy Altman and Jon Fernbacher, my pals Matty Goldberg and Terry Bromberg, WPHD deejay Jim Santella, The News' Dale Anderson and others. The class was led by Jeff Nesin.

At times, we were joined by a Kenmore High School student, Gary Speranza, who later published a magazine called the Shakin' Street Gazette.

In May '74, attending Buffalo State, Sperazza had somehow wangled enough student activity funds to fly in a bunch of nationally known rock writers for a symposium. Bangs, Meltzer, Greg Shaw, Nick Tosches, John Mendelssohn, Lenny Kaye, a pre-Arista Patti Smith and Rob Tyner, lead singer of MC5 (a Detroit band), showed up, along with Altman and Fernbacher, having forfeited their amateur status by selling reviews to Circus.

Bangs and some of the others were billeted in a dormitory at Buffalo State. They reportedly had attempted to foment a panty raid, failed, then tried to solicit sex, presumably from coeds, by running around the quad and shouting. Not surprisingly, this tactic, too, was unsuccessful. DeRogatis reports in his new Lester Bangs biography "Let It Blurt" that they tried to get nice Goodhue's, standing in line, in the run, but didn't get past the guy at the door.

The rock critics' panel was wild and wooly. With no clear agenda, topic or proposition ("Resolved: Rock criticism is an oxymoron"), Nesin, the designated grown-up, gamely attempted to moderate. But Nesin was smart enough (and more than cool enough) to let things unfold when it was clear that no order would be imposed.

I'll spare the play-by-play (it's in DeRogatis' book), but highlights were: Meltzer and Bangs' tag-team verbal trashing of the Village Voice's Robert Christgau, Bang's recitation of a letter written by Canned Heat's manager to Rolling Stone that got him banned from that publication, and Meltzer's questions to Zoo World editor Asbar Levy ("What's your favorite Jewish holiday?")

The panel broke up after Tosches invited everyone — audience included — to a party, presumably in the dormitory where some of the participants banked.

It had lasted about 40 minutes, preceded by a poetry reading by Patti Smith, accompanied by Lenny Kaye. (I knew it wasn't quite rock 'n' roll, so it had to be art, but what did I know?)

The next day, I drove Bangs and Tyner over to my Fillmore Avenue apartment for some scrambled eggs and sanity. Bangs was very polite, clearly appreciating my bourgeois hospitality. My parents would have, no doubt, been proud.

What happened to the rest of the writers? Well, panel participant Nick Tosches wrote several books, including a highly acclaimed biography of Dean Martin, which Martin Scorcese wants to film, and, most recently, an explosive biography of boxer Sonny Liston. "The Nick Tosches Reader" was just published by Da Capo books, and includes plenty of references to Meltzer and Bangs, and some other shorter work.

Altman continues to contribute to the New York Times, People and other publications, and published a biography of humorist Robert Benchley. Fernbacher passed away last year. Nesin is president of the Memphis College of Art.

I lost touch with Mendelsohn. Shaw runs Bomp, an alternative record label. Meltzer's new book, "A Whore Just Like the Rest," offers ample documentation of his wildly brilliant and hilarious music writing.

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